

Supporting Your Athletes

Sport performances are influenced by many different factors. Is the athlete physically ready to play? Is the athlete well-trained and does the coach have a game plan? Is the athlete mentally tough enough? What are the playing conditions for this competition? What is often overlooked, but also influential in determining the quality of the sport performance, is the athletes' interpersonal relationships and thus their emotional state.

As social beings, athletes rely on their relationships with family, friends, romantic partners, coaches, teammates...etc. for support and caring. These important relationships help them stay on an even keel by providing a wide range of support -- from emotional (e.g., caring and concern), to tangible (e.g., help moving), to technical (e.g., learning new plays), to problem solving (e.g., what scholarship should I accept?), to financial (e.g., help paying overdue bills) – to cope with the stressors they face. In most instances, these support systems are adequate and can help athletes cope with their stressors. For example, if an athlete ends a romantic relationship, he may turn to his teammates and family for support to help him get through this difficult period of time. But what happens when these support systems are unable to offer adequate assistance? In such instances, athletes' psychological state may be affected by worry, difficult emotions, and a general sense of inadequacy. Often, athletic performances are the last thing to be affected.

Thus, if you suspect that an athlete in your care or under your supervision may be experiencing interpersonal concerns/stressors, you may want to reach out to that athlete to talk about his/her situation. Sometimes, simply expressing concern and caring is enough. In other situations, you may not be able to rectify the situation yourself, but by talking with the athlete you may be able to help him/her get the assistance they need, such as from a counselor or sport psychologist. Because athletic performance may be the last thing to go, don't rely on it as an indicator of how the athlete is doing overall.

At the Center for Sport Psychology and Performance Excellence at the University of North Texas, we have a trained staff of consultants who genuinely care about the athletes, coaches, and teams with whom we work. If you would like more information about how we could help your coaches and athletes build a skill set to enhance their ability to create positive relationships or how we could help athletes manage their emotions about a relationship loss, please contact us at 940-369-7767 or sportpsych@unt.edu or look us up on the web at www.sportpsych.unt.edu. We leave you with our quote of the week:

“Treat others as you would like to be treated” – The Golden Rule